

THE FAMILY AND THE CROSS

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS AND THEIR RELATION TO FAMILY LIFE

By Joseph A. Breig

INTRODUCTION

ASK MOTHERS AND fathers if they would like to become saints. Many apologetically answer, “Would that I had the time! I am too busy rearing the children, keeping house, making ends meet.” This recalls the days when some considered sanctity a luxury for the rich, who in being able to afford servants, could spend long hours in church and in prayer: they were often considered to be the holy ones. Pope Benedict XV defined holiness as “doing the will of God according to one’s state of life.” In the state of grace and with the right intention, married people can become saints doing their everyday home work. They often gain more graces with a dish cloth than with a Rosary, as one may sometime gain more graces getting up in the middle of the night to care for a baby than spending an hour in church. It is a matter of doing the right thing at the right time. Yes, but even more, it is fulfilling a sacramental vocation. This cannot be said in the same sense about being a lawyer, or a secretary, or a farmer. Marriage is a vocation; it is holy; it is a sacrament; it is a means of going to heaven. It is interesting that only three of the sacraments are entitled “holy”: Holy Eucharist, Holy Orders, Holy Matrimony—not that the others are not holy but these are specifically designated. As a priest gets graces when he hears confessions, preaches, reads his breviary, so a couple under the right conditions is flooded with God’s graces when they love each other, nurse a baby, teach the children. This because they too are fulfilling their vocation. It is because more and more people see marriage as a vocation that we can hope for more and more saints among those living family life. In Peru four natives have already been canonized and one beatified in a hundred years. In the U.S.A. so far we still have had no natives canonized. I am afraid we are not even remotely thinking in the direction of trying to be worthy to be a canonized saint.

Mr. Joseph Breig makes a new and important contribution to family spirituality in this book, “The Family and the Cross.” We priests may sometimes clericalize holiness; we may portray holiness as something purely monastic. In this booklet there is a unique and attractive lay vocabulary, lay thinking, lay example. It is a timely emphasis.

Married couples are sometimes unaware that suffering is one of their great home-made tools for sanctity. It is looked upon as an annoyance, but Christian marital love necessarily involves suffering, for the essence of unity is not so much to enjoy each other, but to suffer together. Still joy and suffering are not two sides of a unity called love. What was once “desire” before marriage becomes “offering” after marriage. Some have described love as having three aspects: the digestive, the reciprocal, and the oblativ. It is in the “oblativ” sense, this self-giving and suffering that a couple purifies love. Without these elements, love would die, for passion can only promise, love can keep that promise. To refuse the call of self-immolation is the “sin” of obduracy and a rejection of love. One is then of no use to God, to society, to each other, or to oneself. To say “no” to this human impulse is to corrupt all one touches. It is the cult of selfishness. The Cross can teach us to love our neighbor; it can teach us compassion. Three-fourths of us, it is said, need it, but there is a strange, unhappy feeling that in too many souls this ingredient is left out.

The Cross is our main tool of sanctity at home. Christian love understands the Cross if it is seen in the context of Heaven. For pagans the Cross is a scandal. It absorbs them like whirlpools in a river at flood height. Suffering, however, must draw men outside of themselves. It is a reminder of Divinity itself. Not good in itself, the Cross can be priceless as a means of grace.

The bell rings in the life of everyone of us and all of us are someday called upon to suffer. The non-Christian tries to escape suffering and he becomes hard and selfish. He seeks comfort only and his spiritual energy dries up, but he must learn to suffer or it will destroy him. The egotist detaches himself from spiritual reality and becomes a hollow being—an empty body. Like the statue of Buddha, he looks down only at his own stomach and does not see the needy around him.

Not all can see the value of suffering. Suffering is often so inward, so hard to articulate. It has been a special mystery

to all, especially pagans. Their many explanations have never been satisfactory. The Stoic saw in suffering a test of sheer courage; he was completely indifferent to it. The Epicurean saw his answer in pleasure, and the Dolorist tried to delude himself and saw evil as good and actually exulted in that which diminished him. Others saw in suffering only a mere punishment.

In his down-to-earth meditations, Mr. Breig gives a Catholic answer to the existence of the Cross. He shows that those who suffer most could well be our most important parishioners. A good Catholic makes friends with pain. He holds God's gifts close to himself but always with open hands. When God allows us sufferings it is not "to do us harm but to gather us into His arms." Suffering never gags a Christian, upon it he sharpens his teeth. Like a cargo stabilizing a ship against storms, so suffering stabilizes us against the storms of passion. Mr. Breig weaves suffering into everyday family life and helps explain its mystery. Humanity will ever question suffering, as Job did so dramatically and so officially. But Job gave an answer. Pagan philosophers never learned it. Christ gave the answer for all times: suffering calls less for a philosophy, more for a living of it as worthwhile. "So vast was this question," says Paul Claudel, the great convert to Catholicism, "that the Word alone could answer it, but He did so not by an explanation, only by His presence." This presence helped Mary who stood beneath the first Red Cross crimsoned by the blood of her Son; it helped Veronica who so lovingly held a cool, moist compress to the throbbing, fevered brow of Christ; it helped Simon of Cyrene, who later gave his life to serve others, this same Simon must have seen the pallid face of Christ among the poor and on every crumpled pillow where a sick man's head lay.

We learn with St. Francis de Sales that the love of Jesus begins in the Passion. We learn with Bishop Neumann of the deep beauty of the Litany of the Sacred Heart—a prayer he vowed to say every day. With St. Alphonsus we become more conscious of the Cross. It is constantly in his writing. When he saw a nail, a rope, a thorn, he thought instantly and tenderly of the Passion. The Cross returns us to the nothingness that we are and yet it lifts us into eternity. With Abraham Lincoln we fall on our knees often with the realization that there is no one else to go to.

In many churches of the country a large, special cross is carried in church for the Stations. There is no corpus on the cross; each person is reminded that he must replace Christ on the cross. He must learn how to suffer and why he suffers. He must be an extension of Christ. Christ has plunged Himself into humanity and wants us to make Him real today. He wants us to continue His Redemption, but this is done not by writing a good book, or organizing well, or by a great oration. One is a Christian when he or she represents Christ, "witnesses" Christ. Deeply we surrender our will, not with a mere external offering like that of Cain, but with an internal-external oblation like that of Abel—like that of Christ. The external gift is a symbol of the internal giving. We represent Christ so perfectly that we become a mystery to those around us.

In the everyday romance of the world we pierce our valentines with an arrow. The Sacred Heart is the first, true Valentine sent by the Father. But His love is pictured by a heart and a cross rather than an arrow. His heart is not only the symbol of love but the Cross of hope. The Cross is not the symbol of death; it is the symbol of life. The Stations do not end with a dead Christ in the tomb, but a glorious, living Christ on Easter Sunday, and always in our tabernacles. He is every city's most distinguished resident who invites His best friends constantly to "take up your Cross and follow Me." The Cross is Christ's way of identifying Himself and His own. Christians realize it is a gift, not a curse for with Dante "sorrow remarries us to God."

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I—JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

EACH OF US is condemned to death. Let's face it. There is no use in being afraid of facts. We may turn our backs, but the facts won't go away. The sensible thing, the honest thing, and in the long run by far the pleasantest thing, is to see life clearly as it really is, to accept its conditions, and then to make the most of it.

Every parent, it seems to me, ought to make the effort of profoundly realizing that the moment a child is born, the child starts to grow away from its father and mother. The child, indeed, begins to die, even in the instant that it begins to live. By honest facing of such realities, we can make realities serve us, make them stimulate us rather than terrifying us into inaction—or wrong action.

It is simply a fact of family life that children are made to serve God, not to serve parents. And parents are made to serve God, not to serve children. These are happy facts; not unhappy facts. And understand, I am only trying to get the emphasis right, because it is the emphasis that is at the root of all happiness, and all true success.

Much of every child's service of God will consist in being good to his parents. And much of each parent's service of God will consist in being good to the children. But as I said, the emphasis must be right, because if it isn't, we will all harm one another instead of helping one another.

Dreadful damage is done to children by parents who act on the unspoken assumption that children exist to serve parental comfort or parental ambitions. And dreadful damage is done to children who are allowed to grow up supposing that their parents exist to serve them. Corrosive family unhappiness is rooted in such errors.

We must get clear in our heads and hearts, from the beginning, that if God sends us a child, he sends us some one who is made to serve Him—to take up his cross and follow Christ. We ought not to shy away from that word "cross." God sends no cross that we cannot carry; and most of our crosses are small ones. The point is to trust Christ and follow Him; He will not let our backs be broken.

Now if you will face honestly the facts about your own destiny, then almost automatically you will rear your children to face honestly and bravely the facts about theirs. And if you do that, you will have prepared your children properly for life—for this life and life everlasting.

There is no sense in concealing from ourselves and our little ones that we are condemned to death by Adam's sin; that the central fact of life is death, and that the life that achieves a good death is the only life worth the living, the only life that is successful.

Nor should we try to evade the fact that although we are condemned by inheritance to physical death, there is a truly terrible and hideously permanent death to which we can condemn ourselves—and to which nobody else can condemn us: the death of the soul.

Once we have faced those realities, there is nothing else that we need fear overmuch. Other condemnations, certainly, will come upon us. Pilate was a figure of the compromising and vacillating world. He was the incarnation of the time-serving of the world, as Christ was the incarnation of God who is infinitely just and good. God and the world faced each other in Christ and Pilate.

There will be Pilates in our lives and the lives of our children.

Time-servers will counsel cowardice, and condemn us if we reject it. The world sometimes will wash its hands of us if we follow Christ. Let it wash.

God forbid that we should be the Pilate type of parent, teaching cheap Pilatetry to our boys and girls! No; what we want is not over-protected youngsters, but youth prepared to face up to life, to face it with Christ and as Christ faced it. We do not want a young man or a young woman clinging to us when duty calls; we want the kind who will take us by the hand firmly, say good-bye, let go, and turn away into destiny. And we want to be the kind of parents who proudly watch our children go.

The world will often wash its hands of brave and just men. But Christ came to redeem every one, including Pilate. What we want in our family life is the courage to join Christ in His work of Redemption; to be undisturbed when the world washes its hands, and to go on working serenely for the salvation of the very world that rejects us.

Parents and children must go away from one another in order that they may be forever united. It is the task of the Christian parent to turn the eyes and hearts of youngsters to God. And when that is done, we shall find that they have really been turned to us. But if we sentimentally make our children our own conveniences instead of God's servers, we shall discover to our horror that we have lost them entirely.

As I said, it is a matter of emphasis. But the emphasis makes a difference as wide as the gulf between heaven and hell. Christ allowed Pilate to condemn Him not only that He might die for our redemption, but also in order to teach us that all things—including a Son's love for His Mother and a Mother's love for her Son—must yield to duty—to the will of God.

We are all condemned to death, but only so that death can open for us the door of life. The heart of a parent is burdened when a child answers God's call to marriage or to religious life—but only in order that the same heart may later be proudly lifted to inexpressible happiness. That is the thing about the will of God—it demands of us only in order to give, heaped up, pressed down and running over; because God is infinitely good and infinitely wise.

And this is the great truth that we must convey to our children, both by word and example but above all by example—that life calls for courage and loyalty and devotion, and that the world's opinion is a small thing. If the world has a good opinion of us, let us smile it away; and if the world has a bad opinion, let us smile that away too. What matters is not the world's opinion and its nervous swinging between defense of us and condemnation of us. What matters is not Pilate's judgment but Christ's friendship; and the family which realizes that, has discovered the deepest secret of happiness and success.

II—JESUS IS MADE TO CARRY THE CROSS

THOSE AFFLICTED with self-pity have often debased the concept of "carrying the Cross." They have made it a sniveling idea. Their sighs and tears and pietistic postures make it appear that they are being terribly put upon, and are bearing dreadful and unfair burdens with fantastic heroism. This sort of thing does indeed invite derision from scoffers like the communists, with their taunts about "pie in the sky" and about religion being the opium of the people.

This is a penalty which true religion has had to pay for its kindness and patience with the weakest and most self-centered of its adherents. And men—that is, men as distinguished from women—must accept a large part of the guilt for this distortion of the noble and manly idea of taking up one's cross and carrying it courageously and cheerfully. Far too many men have left religion to women and children; and what result could have been expected but that religion would come to appear feminine and sometimes almost childish? Women and children would not be women and children if they behaved like men. The fault is not theirs; the fault is men's for not having been religiously manly.

The carrying of the cross, rightly understood, is the manliest idea in the world. In the final analysis, it is the only manly idea. No man is a real man who shirks crosses. But this does not mean that a man—or a woman or a child—should go around with upcast eyes like a plaster saint, making a great show of self-conscious patience under intolerable tribulations. The plain truth is that most of our tribulations are rather easily tolerable if only we will not magnify them out of all proportion with our own theatricalism.

The trouble with far too many of us is that we go through life as if we were writing, producing, directing, starring in, and ourselves being the audience for a melodrama about ourselves. Some people can make a Broadway production out of a headache, and a Shakespearean tragedy out of a smashed fender on their automobile. They are victims of self-dramatization and of a frantic sentimentalism. There are folks who will mourn the loss of a dog as if they had lost their immortal souls. These are the people who, as Chesterton remarked, spell the word "dog" backward. They make a dog their god; and if the dog dies, they behave as if the light had gone out of the sky and the future had turned to unrelieved despair.

To point this out is not being anti-dog or anti-anything. It is merely one of a thousand handy examples of the exaggeration of an ordinary sorrow into a thing too terrible to be borne. There are women who will become unfit to live with for weeks if a vase is broken. There are men who are inconsolable if their alma mater loses a football game. There are people who smash what ought to be a happy marriage because the wife wants to sleep instead of getting up for breakfast, or because the husband prefers reading books to dancing. We could multiply examples endlessly, but what we are talking about is those unfortunate human beings who have never outgrown being spoiled children, who have never learned to come to terms, realistically and good-naturedly, with life as life actually is.

The Christian concept of carrying the Cross is simply a nutshell description of an honest, mature and religious outlook on life. It is a simple fact that even the longest life is short. Even the most atrocious suffering must end. Even the most

poignant sorrow is comparatively brief. The truth is that life and everything in life are merely means to an end, to a purpose, to an achievement. And the achievement is nothing short of an eternity of such happiness as cannot possibly be described because it is far beyond the power of the human mind to realize or to imagine.

When facts like those are firmly grasped and profoundly understood by the soul, then you have a man who is a man, or a woman who is a woman. You have a person who can put everything in a right perspective. You have somebody who is prepared to carry any cross because he knows that he is walking toward a fulfillment that will make everything, in retrospect, seem small. And this kind of person will not snivel over his crosses. He will not enlarge his crosses in his own mind until they tower like skyscrapers and increase in weight until they crush him.

The manliness, the magnificent manliness, of Christ is little appreciated. Christ knew from the instant of His conception what the climax of His life would be. He knew that his task was to live the most burdened life in all human history, and to die the most sorrowful death. But never did Christ have one instant of self-pity or self-glorification. He went at the work of living and of redeeming in the way that a real football star goes about the labor of driving toward the goal posts for a touchdown. The player can see his objective, and it is his objective that is ever uppermost in his mind. He is hardly aware of the bumps and bruises and weariness he endures on his way to the last stripe on the field. And that was the kind of manliness that Christ had.

Christ took up His cross because He had a job to do. He embraced it because it was the way to the eternal glory for which He had been born. And that is the attitude that each of us should have toward the crosses that come our way as the years pass.

Does one of your children die? Well, death is something for which each of us is born; it is a thing that is ever present in every life. What is really important is not the time of death, but the kind of death. Any good death at any time, any death in the love of God, is an everlasting triumph. Of course you sorrow if a child dies; but you do not, if you are a grownup Christian man or woman, elevate your sorrow into a religion forevermore. You do not make your sorrow a kind of idol to be worshipped each day that you live. You take up the cross, you carry it manfully, and by your courage and cheerfulness you make it smaller and smaller until it is very light. After all, each passing day, if you have the true view of life, brings you closer to the endless reunion with your child in unthinkable happiness.

It is properly the task of men to make religion a thoroughly manly thing. Oh, religion is womanly, too, and it is child-like. True religion is universal; it embraces every one. But religion is not what it ought to be unless it is manful also; unless it is firmly embraced and profoundly encompassed by real men who see life honestly and see it whole, and refuse to shrink from it or run away. Carrying the cross, truly, is nothing else than living bravely with the right motives and the right kind of love of God and fellowmen.

III—JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

THE FATHER WHO has never reached the heights in business, industry or a profession is often the loudest in condemning his son for not making a brilliant record in school. The mother who bores all her friends stiff is not infrequently the first to criticize her daughter for not excelling in social graces.

To put the same thought into other words, you can usually depend on the man who never played football to denounce the mistakes of the team he is watching; and the chap who couldn't throw a k ball to save his soul will tell everybody in ten thousand words what is wrong with the pitching in the big leagues.

The fellow who isn't trying—who isn't even playing—is often the first to criticize the fellow who is. And this small and mean and annoying human practice extends into the field of our relations with our Creator. The irreligious man—the chap who never goes to church—delights in reciting the faults and sins of religious people. This is a peculiarly simple-minded form of hypocrisy, because it ignores all the complexities of human nature, and the almost endless complications of the struggle for sanctity.

It is also almost a dead giveaway We cannot ever really judge anybody, but we may be sure that there is something wrong with the spiritual life of the man or woman who is quick to find fault and slow to praise. Often there is something

very wrong with that person's psychological life, too. He is trying to build himself up by tearing the other fellow down. He may not realize this, but more often than not it is a deep-seated cause of his critical attitude.

Another profound cause is lack of charity—that is, of love of God and fellowmen. Whoever really loves the other chap will be instant in recognizing and mentioning his virtues and achievements, and slow to speak of his sins and failures. When the other fails, he will either help him to his feet, or look the other way. He will not point a finger and shout at the crowd to draw attention to the fallen figure. If he does, he is not at all like God; and to be like God is our business.

We would all be in a frightful position if we were to be treated by God as most of us treat one another. Christ was asked point-blank by St. Therese, the Little Flower, whether her faults displeased Him. His answer was no. What other answer was possible? Sin alone displeases God; and faults are not sins. Faults are simply failures due to the fact that we are human beings and not angels. A dish may slip from our fingers and shatter, simply because we are human. Nothing of the sort could happen to an angel.

But men are not angels. It is of paramount importance that we realize this fact, and behave accordingly. I have heard of parents whipping children because they accidentally smashed something around the house. To the Christian soul, that sort of thing is sickening. And why is it sickening? Because the Christian soul is moved by love of God and neighbor; and love does not indulge in ill-tempered injustice.

But what of those who exaggerate and over-punish not merely the mistakes and faults, but the sins—the real sins—of others? The damage that they can do to the spiritual life is incalculable. They can discourage people who are striving for holiness. They can even cause people to stop trying altogether. In that case, they run the frightful risk of being responsible, in large part, for the loss of an immortal soul.

Let the irreligious and the carping man scoff and scorn all he pleases; the fact remains that most of us achieve holiness not by soaring in a jet-like flight, but by falling and rising, falling and rising, stumbling and getting up and going on. Only a foolish person is shocked by the sins of others. The wise man knows that wounded human nature will fall. He expects it to fall. He is never surprised by its falls. He is not specially concerned over its falls; what he cares about, chiefly, is spurring others to keep on trying.

Christ carrying the cross to Calvary is a picture of the ordinary spiritual life. Spiritually, Christ could not fall; being God as well as man, He could not be like us in that. But in all else He was like us. His body, like ours, could grow weary, could collapse under a burden. But when Christ fell under His cross, He did not stay down; He struggled to His feet and went on.

The true Christian is like that in his spiritual progress. He does not run to the heights; he staggers, he weaves, he falls, he rises, he struggles, he fails, but he never gives up. Those who stand scoffing at him are like those who stood hooting at Christ walking the way of the cross. But no decent man wants to be like the hooters. The decent man wants to be like Simon of Cyrene; he wants to lift part of the burden, and encourage the burdened one to go on, and to go on going on until at last he achieves success.

Where else than in the family do we have a better right to demand that everybody be like Simon of Cyrene? If a husband and wife cannot be helpful to each other, and to their children, to whom can they be of service? If they carp and nag, if they scoff and find fault, if they exaggerate every fault and sin to the proportions of final failure, will not they destroy the spiritual life in that home, and with it the happiness that ought to be present?

It is the duty of parents to be Simons of Cyrene. Simon did not ask whether Christ was guilty or innocent. That was not his concern. His task was to help somebody who needed help. And it is likewise the task of fathers and mothers to take up the burdens of their children, to lead the way forward and upward, and always to encourage and never to discourage. Children will sometimes be guilty; but guilty or innocent, they have the right to be able to turn with confidence to their parents.

This confidence is something that parents must earn. They must earn it day in and day out, beginning with the moment when their little ones are taking their first faltering steps. Children are entitled to know from long experience that no matter how far they may fall, in no matter what depths they may become mired, they can be sure that when they turn to

their parents, they will be received with understanding and sympathy, and will be helped.

The parent who thus rears his children will reap a hundred rewards, heaped up, pressed down and running over, because his children will love him, will respect him, and will almost certainly, immediately or later, try to measure up to the measure of his love for them. But the youngster who is nagged and accused and berated, whose every fault and failure is magnified from a mole hill into a mountain—or from a mountain into a mountain range—can hardly be expected to rise up and call his parents blessed. In fact, he can hardly be expected to rise at all, once he has fallen, because he has received little but hooting from those who ought to have cheered him on.

IV—JESUS MEETS HIS BLESSED MOTHER

IT IS UTTERLY impossible for any human being to come within a mile of appreciating fully the sacrifice made by Mary when she gave her divine Son for our salvation.

God alone can understand it. We cannot, because in order to do so we would have to be as pure as Mary, as totally sinless as she, and equally capable of love. We are not.

But there is one thing that we can understand and appreciate, and that is that neither Mary nor Christ sniveled when they met while He was on His way to crucifixion.

Jesus was wounded infinitely more, and Mary immeasurably more, than any one of us possibly can be, but they did not indulge in self-pity or in recriminations against God for appointing them to carry so dreadful a burden.

Christ is God, and as God He perceived clearly and completely why He was going to His death, and what incalculable good He was accomplishing. Christ is man, and as man He was intolerably laden with our sins.

But Mary is human only; and as a woman we salute her and boast of her.

In the hours of Christ's Passion, she did indeed give mankind something of which to be proud forevermore. She is one of us, who are less than the angels; but she earned a place unthinkable higher in eternity than the place of the highest and holiest angel.

The poet who called Mary "our tainted nature's solitary boast" was inexpressibly more right than he could possibly have realized. Not any of us can ever grasp with our minds the fullness of Mary's nobility and dignity. No honor that we can pay to her, save only the divine honor which belongs to God alone, is too much honor. Because of her, a representative of our human race is enthroned in the highest place possible for any creature. One of our own is Queen of Heaven, Mother of God, co-Redeemer with Christ, and co-Ruler of the everlasting kingdom.

Unless we understand something about Mary, we cannot understand much about the Passion of Christ. Christ's physical sufferings, dreadful though they were, were small and superficial compared with his psychological and spiritual agony. If we cringe at the thought of the tortures inflicted upon Him, if our hearts ache at the sight of the beatings and piercings, then we ought to feel utterly broken in the presence of his invisible torments.

They were invisible, but they become visible to the eye of one who meditates upon Mary. For Mary's passion was entirely psychological and spiritual; it was completely invisible, yet so terrible that had Christ's sufferings been merely of the body and not of the soul at all, then Mary's agony would have been an agony more frightful than His.

We cannot begin to see into the depths of what Jesus sacrificed for us until we turn our minds into the heart of Mary to perceive what she endured in contributing to our redemption. It is not enough to say that Mary suffered the equivalent of death. She suffered more and worse than the equivalent of death.

Death has its bodily terrors, but the most terrible terror of death is the rending apart of a creature in his deepest depths; it is the separation of body and soul, compared with which nuclear fission is a mild and slight division.

Now the agony of Mary was an agony incomparably more dreadful than the rending of a man's being by death. What death tears apart is an arrangement of nature; and that is a frightful tearing. But it is as nothing compared with the forcible separation of total love from total love. And that was what happened when Our Lady was separated from her Son.

Mary's whole matchless being, capable of unthinkable greater love than any other creature, was utterly in love with her Son. To be separated from her Son, to see her Son reviled and wounded, was for her worse than an eternal succession

of physical deaths. Indeed, it is impossible to understand how Mary's physical heart endured the sight of the tormented Christ without physically breaking and bringing on bodily death. I personally would speculate that her heart was miraculously preserved from breaking.

However that may be, what Mary endured was of the type of what Christ endured in the Garden of Gethsemane, when His human nature was so inexpressibly tormented by His horror of sin that He sweat blood. It does not seem to me that Our Lady's body, unless divinely sustained, could have survived the spiritual and psychological torture she endured in seeing her Son led to execution in unthinkable suffering. I think that God's intervention must have been necessary to keep her from dying on the spot when she met Jesus on His way to Calvary.

We approach now the depths of this matter. For not only did Mary endure a million deaths upon millions of deaths, but she never for a moment doubted God and God's goodness. Not for an instant did she rebel. Not even remotely did she allow her faith to be shaken. Her will never turned the tiniest fraction of an inch from her utter consecration to God and to God's inscrutable purposes.

In the midst of a spiritual agony which ought to have shaken the universe into chaos, she freely gave her Son for our redemption. She gave Him back to the impenetrable purposes of God from Whom He had come to her. She made, willingly, indomitably, and with a courage that makes the mind reel, the incomparably supremest sacrifice of which it is possible for any created being to be capable.

Mary gave absolutely everything, she sacrificed all, she held nothing for herself, because her all, her everything, was Christ.

And as I said, she did not snivel. She indulged in no theatrics. Not once did she cry out that this was too much, that she could not stand it, that to ask this of her was asking more than flesh and blood could endure. There on the way to Calvary, two beings of unthinkable nobility looked into each other's eyes and faced squarely, without the slightest retreat or deviation, the most awful duty of which it is possible to conceive.

Christ and Mary had a work to do. They had a world to save. They had a spiritual family to bring forth in unutterable anguish. Upon them fell the grinding, crushing labor of giving birth to the children of God who are to share with God His own divine life and happiness forever and forever.

That was their task, the task of Jesus and Mary; and although it meant for each of them such suffering and rending as is utterly outside the grasp of the human mind, they proceeded to it bravely, without the slightest outcry of protest.

This indeed was nobility. This indeed was royalty. Christ and Mary did not shrink from, nor complain about, taking up your burden and my burden and everybody's burden. They simply took up the burdens without question because they loved not themselves and their comforts, but God and their fellowmen. And this is what we must try to learn from them—that only the fool sees from the hiddenly merciful designs of God, which come out of His infinite love and wisdom, not for our destruction, but for our perfection and glorification.

V—SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS CARRY THE CROSS

NOW HERE IS a strange thing. Here is a bewildering thing. Here is a downright dumbfounding thing. Christ the omnipotent, He who could say to a mountain, "remove from here," and it would remove—Christ no longer can carry His cross. Christ needs somebody to help Him to carry out His mission of salvation.

Christ is falling, Christ is fainting, Christ is failing. Christ needs an assistant; Christ the rescuer of all mankind needs rescuing. And in this moment of shattering drama, does God send an angel, or a prophet, a flaming personality such as John the Baptist? No, God sends a man of whom nobody ever has heard. God selects a chance passer-by to lift Christ's burden and to walk beside Christ on the way to Golgotha.

What mystery is this, that the most ordinary and casual onlooker is lifted to immortality, is chosen to lend his strength to the All-Powerful One when the All-Powerful One is helpless? Cannot the divine Christ, the healer of lepers, the giver of sight to the blind, the restorer of life to the lifeless, cannot He finish his work unless he is assisted by this Simon of Cyrene who has blundered onto the scene, and who, we may guess, has small taste for carrying crosses for condemned

criminals?

Mystery it is indeed; mystery of mysteries. It is as mysterious, this incident, as St. Paul's remark about filling up in his own body what is wanting in the passion of Christ. What can possibly be wanting in the passion of Christ? Although we know that God could have repaired fallen human nature by a simple act of His Will, yet He demands for our personal salvation an act of our will, a cooperation with His grace.

This is the mystery of human freedom, without which man is not really man at all. Man to be man must be able to make choices. Man to be what he is, the image and likeness of God, must distinguish between good and evil, and choose good. How else is man to have any dignity? How else is man to be like unto God? How else is man to be happy—for does not happiness consist in the knowledge that one has done the good that one ought to do, and avoided the evil that one ought to avoid? How can man share forever in the happiness of God unless he has identified himself with that happiness by freely choosing God and God's way?

It is like asking whether any of us can enjoy the beauty of a sunset without ever having gazed upon a sunset, or the lilting joy of symphony music without having listened to it. What the conductor of an orchestra feels, we cannot feel without sharing, according to our capacity, in his experience. We cannot have any of his happiness in music without ourselves entering into music. Neither can we enter into God's eternal joy without choosing for ourselves the cause of that joy, which is God's goodness.

There are those who blindly complain about this; who would prefer that God force His happiness upon them without their doing anything to make themselves capable of it. But this is impossible. As well might we ask that we know the joys of love while refusing to love; or the pleasure of knowledge while declining to learn. If you do not know a single word of English, and resolutely refrain from acquiring any English, it would be foolish of you to complain because you cannot enter into the joy of reading Shakespeare in his own tongue. You are simply incapable, through your own choice, of sharing in the experience and the insights of Shakespeare.

Thus it is with God and man. Christ has opened the door; Christ has led the way; Christ has given us all the means for fitting ourselves for the happiness of heaven. But if we turn our backs, if we walk the other direction, if we reject the means, then we shall find that with respect to God's happiness, we are like blind men trying to enjoy the sight of flowers, we are like the deaf wanting to listen to music, we are like paralyzed persons longing for dancing and the poetry of movement. We must do our part. We must lift a burden as Simon lifted; we must walk with Christ as Simon walked. We must fill up in ourselves, as St. Paul filled up, what is wanting of the passion of Christ.

The point is that what is wanting in the passion of Christ is my little bit, and your little bit. In one sense, Christ climbed alone to Calvary. In another sense, He climbed in the midst of a countless multitude of other climbers, each carrying his own little cross, his own little duty, his own contribution to the unselfish immolation of love. The passion of Christ took place at a certain time and in a certain place; but it extends backward to Adam and Eve, and forward to the last man and woman.

What we ought to see when we contemplate Christ's sacrifice is not the sacrifice of Christ alone, but the sacrifice of Christ expanded into countless other hearts and souls. This is the meaning of the Mystical Body of Christ; this is the meaning of the Church. The Church is Christ saving all of us by enlisting our willing cooperation. The Church is Christ and you and I and a vast concourse of others, indomitably struggling upward and onward toward the death that is the opening into life everlasting. Every last one of us is, or ought to be, a Simon of Cyrene, walking through life with Christ, enduring bravely life's vicissitudes and keeping our eyes always on the goal until it is achieved.

Unless the Simons do their part, the Simons cannot accomplish what Christ gave them the power to accomplish. All this is a mystery, and yet it ought to be as plain as a pikestaff.

Let us express it in this manner—the confessionals are always open, and guilt can be blotted out of our souls in an instant, but not if we will not enter the confessional. And even if we enter the confessional, nothing is accomplished without contrition. Nobody else can be contrite for us; we ourselves must turn from evil to embrace good. The instant we do that, we become capable of the life of God which is the life of love and goodness; we begin, in fact, to share God's

supernatural life on earth. We have a foretaste of eternal joys; we enter into an anteroom to heaven.

But as long as evil is what a man loves, then what he loves is not goodness, and he cannot know the happiness that comes of goodness embraced. To make a homely comparison, if I cannot abide the taste of olives, then olives cannot give me pleasure. If I want the pleasure that olives give, I must change. And if I am to share the happiness of God, then I must fit myself to be happy by God's happiness; I must become like God. I must determine to be a Simon of Cyrene who will be ready to walk with Christ and not to turn away from Christ.

Simon might have been a lover of comfort who would have so weakened his body with self-indulgence and luxury as to have been incapable of lifting the weight of Christ's cross. He was fit for Christ, when the test came, because his muscles were strong, and his soul willing. To each of us comes our moments of Simon-likeness, when we are called upon to do our bit in sharing the passion of Christ which leads to resurrection and glorification with Christ. It is our duty and our high privilege to be always prepared.

VI—VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS

WHAT HAPPENED to Veronica's Veil was simply an outward expression of what happened in Veronica's soul.

Unless we understand this, we understand nothing about the spiritual life.

Christ sometimes chided the multitudes because they came to see signs and wonders, and not to learn from Him the way of holiness.

In Christ's words at such times, we hear a note that can only be called a holy impatience.

He seems to cry out against the blindness of people who cannot seem to see the point of His coming; who are moved by curiosity and excitement, or by a desire for physical healing, or by the hope of having favored positions in a new earthly kingdom—but not by the thirst for truth and goodness.

If we were Veronicas, we would not be running about looking for miracles. We would be looking for opportunities to serve Christ rather than being served by Christ.

If we were Veronicas, we would be able to see the divine behind the human; we would know Christ under all the layers of the world's sorrow and suffering.

If we were Veronicas, we would not need Lourdes and Fatima; we would need only the knowledge that somebody was in need, and that we serve God by serving fellowmen for the sake of God.

Veronica, when she approached Christ, could not have expected, or even wanted, a miracle.

What she saw was a man condemned as a criminal and being led to execution.

What she saw also was an opportunity to do a kindness out of the charity of a heart that kept the two great commandments—love God, and love fellowmen.

Veronica saw a man who was a sight to make one turn away one's eyes.

She saw a man whose flesh had been scourged to ribbons. Upon his head a crown of great thorns had been pressed, so that his hair and face were a mass of dried blood. He had been spat upon and struck with fists. From head to foot he was bloody and bruised; swollen and black and blue. He was a dreadful spectacle.

We may be sure that it took an effort of the will for Veronica to come forward to him and to cleanse his face. Not only was he a repellent sight, but by approaching him in pity she accepted for herself something of the contempt and hatred that was being heaped upon him.

It is likely that people screamed maledictions and taunts at her. No matter; Veronica's soul was a soul that loved.

It was a grace-filled soul; a soul into which Christ could look and see His own reflection, the image and likeness of God.

And so Christ, for a testimony of His own divine power and of Veronica's goodness, impressed upon Veronica's cloth the image of His face.

But He did not chide her for seeking signs and wonders. She did not seek signs and wonders; she sought ways and means of serving God, of serving Christ in His fellowmen, of earning the right to hear eventually from Him the words, "If

you did it to one of these, My least brethren, you did it to me.”

We are all tempted to go seeking signs and wonders rather than to see the signs and wonders that are all around us.

We kneel in church, perhaps, while making the Stations of the Cross, and we wish that we could have been Veronica—that we could have wiped the face of Christ, and seen His face imprinted on the cloth.

Then we go home and never think that the face of Christ is all around us, waiting to be cleansed of its blood and sweat and tears.

The face of Christ is there in the lines on the countenance of Grandpa or Grandma. It is there in the weariness of wife or husband. It is there in the tears of a child over some little mishap. It is next door in the troubles of a neighbor.

The face of Christ is a millioned face. In every human being on earth, it waits for our touch of comfort and encouragement.

A husband is a Veronica when he helps his wife with the dishes, or brings her some token of his affection, or takes her out to dinner, or tells her of his love as he used to tell her in the days of courtship.

A wife is a Veronica when she smiles away her husband’s discouragement over his job or his business; when she lifts his spirits with a word of admiration; when she renews his youth by her devotion.

Fathers and mothers are Veronicas when they kiss away the tears of children; when they quiet their fears about their school work; when they help them with their little concerns; when they praise their small accomplishments, filling them with new confidence.

We are Veronicas when we go next door or into a house down the street to offer our services in times of tribulation. We are Veronicas when we spend some time with lonely aging folk.

The earth is brimful of Christ hiding behind the faces of the worried, the hungry, the sorrowful, the doubtful, the uninstructed. Wherever there is need, there is Christ, waiting for the touch of our Veronica—cloth of kindness on His face.

And each time we touch Him so, His image and likeness grows brighter and clearer in our own souls. It can grow so bright and clear that when the Eternal Father looks upon us, He sees in us His only-begotten Son. And Mary, too, sees her Son in us, as she saw His image on Veronica’s Veil.

Signs and wonders? Is it not a sign and a wonder that with a word and a smile we can lift the soul of another out of sorrow into joy, out of unhappiness into happiness, out of discouragement into hope?

Is it not a sign and a wonder that with the cloth of our unselfish concern, we can smooth away the lines of fear or pain from the face of Christ in one of Christ’s fellowmen? Is it not a sign and a wonder that we can turn the sobbing of a child into laughter?

In the persons of each of His fellowmen, Christ will be carrying His cross as long as the human race endures. There will never be a day or a place in which He cannot be found, His face seamed with suffering or anxiety, and wet with blood or tears, in the face of one of those for whom He suffered.

There is no moment when any one of us cannot be a Veronica. We could be Veronicas even in the solitude of a desert; for although we were isolated from our fellowmen, we could with our prayers come to their assistance, whether they were here on earth, or suffering in Purgatory.

To be a Veronica is the high privilege of every last one of us.

VII—JESUS FALLS THE SECOND TIME

THE SECOND FALL is the fall that brings the temptation of discouragement. But giving up is the one thing above all things that nobody must ever consider doing.

You might almost call a Christian the man who never gives up. You might almost say that Christianity is the religion of not giving up, the faith which emboldens one to go on. Christians can do all kinds of things that they shouldn’t, but the sin from which they flee as from the mouth of hell itself is the sin of throwing in the sponge.

You can’t very well lie down and quit when the One you are following is Christ. He fell, but He got up. And never was

any body wearier and more tormented than His.

He had sweat blood in the garden because His soul was so wracked by horror of sin that He was sorrowful even unto death. He had not slept, not even for the hour that His followers slumbered.

He had been set upon by a band armed with clubs and weapons as if they came for a robber. He had been bound and dragged before the High Priest. He had been buffeted by the servant. He had stood his “trial” before the Sanhedrin.

It was much the same kind of “trial” which we were to see undergone twenty centuries later, by followers of Christ like Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty and Aloysius Cardinal Stepinac.

There were false witnesses. There was a brushing aside of the rights of the prisoner. There was Christ’s calm attempt to make these men see that they were doing wrong—if He had done evil, then let evidence of the evil be brought; if not, why did they strike Him?

He stood there bound while the interminable farce went on, with everybody against Him, and nobody showing the slightest disposition to be fair. And finally the High Priest cut through the double-talk and got right to the point: “I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God.”

Now Christ in all his intolerable exhaustion lifted His head and looked the High Priest in the eye, and answered yes. But in order that there be no possibility of doubt about His meaning, He uttered His solemn warning that He would come later in the clouds of heaven, with great power and majesty, to judge all men—including those who were condemning Him.

This is the Christ Whom we follow; how can a follower of His yield to discouragement; how can anyone despair in whom Christ has come to take up His abode?

Yes, His body was weary unto death, and His soul, sorrowful; but God does not give up, God is all-powerful; God goes on. And the blessed God lives in us by baptism and confirmation and Communion; we are not our own, but Christ’s; we do not live alone, but Christ lives in us. And Christ cannot quit, Christ cannot, will not yield to discouragement.

From the presence of the High Priest He was taken to Pilate while the mob yelled for His blood. Then to Herod, and back to Pilate. And now He was handed over to the torturers to do their fiendish best to break His strength, to break His mind, to break His will.

Hunger and thirst bore down upon Him. Scourging rent His flesh and shed His blood in streams. Thorns pierced His head until it is a wonder that He was not driven mad. And the cross was put upon His back and He was led forth between the howling multitudes.

He fell and fell again, but He got up. And the Christian never stops getting up. The Christian tries and tries and will not stop trying, no matter what burdens weigh upon him, no matter what obstacles are piled in his path, no matter what suffering tears at his vitals.

The Christian in the laboratory fails and fails again, but in the end he discovers the vaccine or the serum that will heal his fellowmen. The Christian in government is back-bitten and slandered; but he goes on for the good of his country.

The Christian father or mother, when the children are ill, is so worn for want of sleep that the head swims; but the Christian parent gets out of bed once more, and another time, and another time, and will not give up.

The Christian caught in the habit of sin struggles loose and is caught again; strives upward and is dragged down; confesses and straightway falls into the same evil; but the one thing that the Christian will not do is to throw up his hands. He will not surrender to the devil or to his human weakness; he will fight on to victory if it takes him every hour of his life and into his deathbed.

If we have faith, said Christ, we can say to this mountain, remove from here, and it will remove. And in the centuries since He walked among us, we have moved so many mountains that we have forgotten nine-tenths of them.

We overthrew the Roman rottenness and persecution; we took the shock of the barbarian invasions and converted the invaders; we turned back the hordes of Mohammedans and the dreadful armies of Atilla the Hun. We broke the power of tyrant after tyrant who tried to chain the Church to his chariot.

We moved the mountain of slavery and overthrew it. We overcame a thousand powerful heresies. We broke the

despotic power of men over women, and restored womanhood to the high estate in which it belonged.

The earth, when Christ came into it, was one mountain range after another of disease and despotism and injustice and cruelty and lust. And the mountains fell one after another because Christian men and women, whatever their other faults, refused to do the one thing that means defeat—to give up. Time after time, the Christians, like Christ, were crushed to earth, but always, like Christ, they got up again and struggled on.

They spread through the world enlightening the ignorant, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, comforting the afflicted, bringing hope to the hopeless; and everywhere their touch, slowly but with indomitable sureness, transformed the world.

How could it be otherwise, when they could say, these Christians, with St. Paul, “Now not I live, but Christ lives in me,” and with St. Patrick, “Christ before me, Christ above me, Christ beside me, Christ in me”? It could not be otherwise, the follower of Christ cannot quit though his soul be sick, though his mind be burdened beyond endurance, though his body be tormented by illness or injury, though his family be scattered, though his business be ruined, though his friends play him false, though the devil himself seems to conspire against him. Who can give up, who can yield to discouragement or despair, when he sees Christ struggling that last hundred yards, that last yard, in order that He might hang upon the cross for our salvation? No; the Christian can fall, but the Christian just won’t lie there and surrender. Not the Christian!

VIII-JESUS SPEAKS TO THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

THERE IS A paradoxical sense in which we owe love and compassion to those outside the Church—and above all to the Jews—even more than to those within.

They need it more.

It is impossible, really, for the Christian to imagine what a dreadful burden it is not to have the Faith.

Within the Church there is laughter like the laughter of children secure in their home and in the love of Father and Mother.

Indeed, the Church is a happy family with God for Father and Christ for Brother and Mary for Mother; and with Joseph and all the angels and saints for good companions.

Outside that family, there is not the same kind of joy. Within it, we live in a kind of anteroom of heaven; we might well say that already we are beginning to know something of the joys that eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the mind of man.

In the voice of Christ there was sorrow and pity rather than reproach when He spoke to the women of Jerusalem: “Weep not for Me, but rather weep for yourselves and your children.”

These women and their descendants were destined to bear through the centuries the cross of not having the Faith.

It is a crushing cross.

There is a mystery here; a deep, deep mystery.

It is akin to the mystery expressed in the liturgy when the Church refers to Adam’s fall as a happy fault because it brought so great a Redeemer.

St. Paul touches briefly on the matter by saying that a darkness was permitted to fall upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in, so that in the end all might be saved.

The Jews bear their burden of exile not alone for themselves, but also for us.

Contemplation of this tragedy nearly stops the heart.

Here were the chosen people who through thousands of years had borne the back-breaking burden of the true God amid hordes of idolators and pagans.

They had borne it with a patience that makes the mind reel. They fell, but always they rose again. They went backward, but always they turned forward once more, whiplashed by the uncompromising words of prophets sent by God.

They were chosen in the sense that they were selected for the sorrow and suffering of bearing witness to eternal divine

truth, justice and goodness in a world given over to deadening and groveling wickedness.

Through the ages they struggled, suffering in mind and body as no other people ever had suffered.

Through the ages they prayed, tearing their garments in the deserts and on the mountains, crying out to the skies to rain down the Just One.

Through the ages they waited and waited for the Messiah, the King, the Deliverer, the Holy One, the Leader and Ruler who would restore the sceptre to Israel.

They thirsted and hungered, did the Jews; they were oppressed and tortured and put to death; they were enslaved and broke free again; they were despised and hated as the world will forever hate those who remind it of God and of the dignity of man, and of man's duties.

The Jews did not suffer alone for themselves; they suffered for us because out of their loins and out of their sorrows was to be born the Savior whose salvation has come upon us.

Through endless generations the Jews endured all things, hungering with a terrible hunger for the Holy One; and when He came, their leaders did not accept Him, and would not let them accept Him.

What a mystery! What a tragedy! "Weep not for Me, but weep rather for yourselves and your children."

The saga of Jewish suffering was not ending; it was to continue—for how long nobody knows.

From their ranks came first the Twelve, and then the three thousand converted by Peter, and others, to enter into the kingdom, to reap the redemption sowed through so many endless years of sorrow.

But for most of them, the darkness remained darkness, and they went on into further centuries, groping through it.

Indeed we do owe them compassion and love.

They gave us Christ and Mary and Joseph; they gave us the Apostles and the first disciples and the first martyrs.

Through the Jews we received the joys—the inexpressible joys—of the Sacraments, and of the unspeakable union with Christ which St. Paul tried to put into words by saying, "Now not I live, but Christ lives in me."

Through the Jews we received the Faith; and if we do not know that the Faith is priceless, is to be treasured above everything else under heaven, then we are fools.

What a mountainous debt we owe the Jews!—what a debt of gratitude and compassion!

The women of Jerusalem wept, and their children weep to this day. Without the Faith, without Christ, this is a weary world, and weary is every day that a man lives in it.

Sad, sad, sad is life without Christ.

Life without Christ is a kind of wilderness in which people wander bewildered, reaching out groping hands and finding no hand to grasp.

What a burden is sin—what a crushing burden—without the Sacrament of Penance which lifts it gently from our hearts and sends us forth as new as if we had but that moment been born.

What burdens upon burdens are the marching days, without Mass, without Communion, without Christ.

But what joys the days are when they are lived with Christ; when we move forward with Him, arm in arm, heart to heart, toward eternal triumph.

How good to know the goal toward which we advance, to see it before us, to walk with the strength of Christ forward and upward.

What a splendor it is to sing through life with St. Francis, because it is not we who live, but Christ in us; Christ directing us, moving us, nourishing us, inspiring us.

What a joy to bubble with laughter like the laughter of children because we are the children of God, and are living in His House.

"Weep not for Me." Weep not for Christ; Christ is doing the will of His Father Who sent Him; Christ is advancing to His glory. Weep only for sin and for the sorrows of those who know not Christ; because to know Christ is happiness, and not to know Him, not to do His will, not live in Him and for Him and with Him, is the only unrelieved sadness on earth.

IX—JESUS FALLS THE THIRD TIME

NOW FOR THE third time there is driven home to us the lesson of the weakness of man which is the adopted weakness of Christ. Christ falls again; and it is physical exhaustion due to physical suffering which makes him do so. But the physical suffering is but the materialization of sin. Christ's agony makes visible to our eyes, and touchable to our touch, and imaginable to our imagination, the effects of sin on our souls. Christ is God incarnate; but we might say that Christ's sufferings are the incarnation of our rebellion against God our Father. It is the making-flesh of our refusal to be good sons and daughters.

The weight of our treason, our ingratitude, our selfishness weigh Christ to the ground. We must understand that there is a familyness about God and man. How God has striven to make us see this! The relationship is not merely one of Creator and creatures. It is more than a relationship; God and we are relatives—the closest possible relatives. He is Father; I am a son. If any one ought to be able to understand what this means, fathers and mothers ought to. Fathers and Mothers know how their hearts, the moment they become parents, are placed in custody of their children, to be cherished or not cherished; to be treasured or to be broken.

A father (or a mother) has as many hearts as there are children. Each child is another opening into love; an opening through which there can enter either joy or sorrow, comfort or suffering. A child can lift a parent to the heights of happiness, or bow him to the earth in crushing misery. And if this can be done by the little love of a man for his son and of a son for his father, what of the love of God for man, which is boundless, unthinkably limitless?

This love of God for man is a mystery which we can penetrate only a little way; but the fact is that by His own decision, dictated by His love, God the all-powerful assumed human nature. Christ suffered in His human nature for us; that nature which He as God assumed out of love for us. And He did so because He desires to be not only Our Creator, but our Father; because He wants not only our obedience, but our love.

When this love is withheld, when we refuse it to Him, that is what scourges Him; that is what crowns Him with thorns; that is what buffets Him with fists and with insults; that is what bows Him down. It is under our withholding of love that Christ falls—once, twice, thrice. This is the weight that is too heavy for Him; this is what breaks the Heart He has given into our keeping.

And if a father and a mother and their children cannot understand this, who shall understand it? Do not they have daily experience of how their hearts are given to one another, and of how so much as a harsh word hurts? Do not they share one another's weaknesses, and by sharing them turn them into strength? Have they not learned how love can turn a home into a little heaven, and how the lack of it can turn a home into a little hell?

If families cannot appreciate the familyness of God and man, then who can appreciate it? God and man emphatically are a family. God as God is the father of each of us and all of us; and God as Christ is our Brother. By His life and His death even as man He earned all our love and our gratitude; they were due to Him always as God.

And yet we sin and press Him to the ground time and again. We sin through our own weakness, and we sin through our impatience and our uncharity toward the weakness of others. We fall, and we cry out for mercy; we excuse ourselves, we point to our own weakness. But others fall, and we berate them. We stand above Christ's fallen brethren and pour scorn and reproaches upon them. Far from extending a helping hand, we consider that we are doing well if we refrain from kicking them. And if we do so to Christ's least brethren, we do so to Christ.

How poignantly does the prostrate figure of Christ on the way to Calvary plead for love, for sympathy, for understanding, for a word of encouragement, for a sign of loyalty! But in each of His fallen brothers and sisters, Christ again is fallen. Christ in them will go on falling to the end of time. In them He will continue to beg that we put ourselves in their place; that we share their burdens and their sufferings. If we refuse, if what we give instead is hardness and coldness, then mistake it not; that is what we would have given Christ had we stood looking down upon Him fallen to the stones on the road to Golgotha.

Parents meditating upon Christ fallen can meditate most richly by seeing in Christ their own children, and in their own children Christ. This is Christ who lies there crushed, beaten, exhausted; but this also is my son or my daughter. If Christ

the perfect man who was incarnate God and not weighed down by original sin—if He could come to the end of His strength, if He could stumble and fall, then by what aberration, what insanity, do I expect unbroken success of my children? If I would not howl at Christ for having fallen, then why do I howl at my children when they fail?

No; love does not do these things. We are not speaking of emotional love, but of true love which is an act of the will. That act of the will puts one on the side of the loved one; it pledges loyalty and devotion through every vicissitude. It says to the child, “You are mine and I am yours, and you can depend upon me every time. I am yours, and you can depend upon me every time. I will be there when you need me, and never will I desert you. I will snatch you if necessary from the very mouth of hell.”

That is what Christ did for every one of us; snatched us from the mouth of hell. We can, if we are determined to do so, turn our backs on Him and reject His rescue. We can negate His victory for ourselves. That is the mystery of free will, which can choose to love or not to love, to serve or not to serve, to be grateful or ungrateful, loyal or disloyal, friend or visitor. But if a father cannot do that to his own son, or a mother to her own daughter, how can they do it to Christ fallen for them on Calvary?

It is God who lies there in the self-imposed weakness of the Incarnation. But it is we also who lie there with Him, for His weakness is made of our weakness. Christ lies there, and we lie there, and our children lie there; and that is the meaning of Christ’s fall. The still fuller meaning is this: Christ got up and went on again to victory, and with Him we go also unless we reject Him and His redemption of us.

X—JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

LITTLE BY LITTLE, family life strips a husband and wife of all kinds of things that weight them down and slow them in their progress toward endless happiness. It strips them of pride; who can be anything but prostrate in humility and helplessness while a baby is being born into the world? In those anxious hours we learn rapidly how utterly dependent we are upon God. We realize profoundly what we have always known but have not really grasped—that He alone has power to give life. We understand His overlordship of everything, and perhaps for the first time we pray with all our hearts and all our strength.

Family life strips us gradually, too, of selfishness. Bit by bit, the willingness to serve replaces the desire to be served. There is a strange power in an infant’s powerlessness; only a monster can refuse to tend a little one who depends upon his parents for absolutely every need.

Family life turns the mind from irresponsibility to responsibility. And it opens the eyes of husband and wife to the enormous folly of sin. How enlightening is the process of trying to teach children the goodness which we ourselves once dismissed as old-fashioned!

Our youthful flippancy is stripped from us. Now we know why there are laws God’s laws, nature’s laws, human laws. Solicitous for the good of our children, we understand suddenly God’s solicitude for our good. We know now that His commandments are not arbitrary or capricious; they are directions for our protection from grievous harm. They are like our commandments to our children—do not cross the street without looking both ways; do not touch poison; do not play with sharp knives; do not get into an automobile with strangers.

“Do not get into an automobile with strangers!” How often we were warned by priests and parents, when we were adolescents, about avoiding bad company! But we thought they were old fogies; we were perfectly capable, we said, of taking care of ourselves. But now we caution our children as we were cautioned; now we know that laws and rules are made by those who love us, in a constant effort to keep us from evil and injury and suffering.

Our smart-aleckry is being stripped away from us. Our conceits are torn from us, and as they go one by one, we realize that they were tapes binding us hand and foot. How we clung to them! We thought they were part of what we called our liberty, but all the time they were holding us in slavery. And when we see them in our children, we recognize them for what they truly are.

Living in the family, we begin to see that the soul, like the body, is vulnerable to injury. We perceive how sin and self-

centeredness and vanity wreck the soul's beauty as an accident can destroy the loveliness of a face, or the grace and mobility of a body. Follies of all kinds are being stripped from us; we are being made ready for the kind of death, when death comes, that is but the last great birth-pain of joy everlasting.

Garments of foolishness, of opinionated obstinacy, are being stripped from us one by one. And at last we come to understand something of the sacramentalism of marriage, the sacramentalism of family life. This is the vocation for which we were ordained in the Sacrament of Matrimony, this life with each other and with our children. This is the way of life in which we are to attain holiness; this is our salvation.

Now we can look upon each other, husband and wife, as far more than mere companions and mutual comforts. Why, we are co-saviors with Christ of each other! In the Sacrament we were united spiritually as well as physically, to the end that we should help each other, and help Our children, to God. In heaven we shall—or we should—owe much of -our salvation to each other. We are together not to hamper each other on the way to everlasting life, but to walk toward it hand in hand, and to draw our little ones with us.

In a certain sense we are as priests. We are the first to wear God's own most beloved name, "Father." We are not merely to bring forth children physically; we are to help bring them forth spiritually, too. Priests are called "Father" because they are ordained for the work of giving life in the supernatural order. But the title came to them from natural fathers; and from the cooperation of natural fathers with the Fatherhood of God came the nobility of the word "Father" on earth.

Now more and more of our blindness, our graspingness, our self-seeking, our self-love, is being stripped from us. More and more clearly do we see the sublimity of marriage and family life. Each bond that is tom from us sets us freer to walk forward in the grace that comes through the Sacrament of Matrimony. We are turning heavenward, and we want our family to turn heavenward with us. Now we rejoice if the children give us spiritual bouquets for our birthdays, instead of shaving kits or smoking jackets. Now our ambitions for our children become less and less worldly, and more and more other-worldly.

No longer do we desire that our children shall marry into wealth or position or power. What we want now is to see them, when their courting days come, meeting young men and young women who are good. Our minds have risen from short-lived earthly things to the incorruptible things of heaven. What we now desire is that our children shall marry others who will help them to salvation, or even better, that they shall enter the religious life.

Our hopes and our prayers are taking a new turn because we have been stripped of the things that were holding us down to earth. It is not that we are no longer conscious of the importance of reasonable success in earthly occupations. It is rather that now we realize that such success is not an end, but a means to an end.

We do indeed desire that our children, if they enter an occupation or a profession, and if they marry, make a success of their chosen field and of their way of life. But now we see that what is everlastingly important is that they use such successes for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. And if they elect the highest vocation—the life of total consecration to the things of God—then we are happy and proud and grateful.

Now the husband and the wife see each other with new eyes. In the beginning, perhaps they were attracted largely by physical beauty, by winning personality, by the capacity for happy companionship and shared entertainment. But now what they see in each other, chiefly, is goodness; and in that they find such joy as they did not previously dream of. Now they are indeed ready to live together happily ever after.

XI-JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

IT IS A FRUITFUL meditation for a parent to think of his own son or daughter nailed to the cross. This does not mean that my child is substituted for Christ, but that through my child—through my love for my child—I am brought closer to Christ.

We parents must learn that it is not our vocation—as it is the vocation of some few—to go to God by forsaking others. Our vocation is to go to God through the embracing of others. From love of those who are ours, we are to deepen our love

of Him Whose we are.

Christian marriage does not mean that a husband and wife love each other with one love, and Christ with another love. They are to love Christ and each other with the same love, and indeed with the same kind of love. There are not really various sorts of love; if we know what love is, there is one love only.

Love is not the physical embracing of another. The embracing is, or ought to be, an expression of love; and if it is not that, then it is not what it ought to be. If a husband and wife do not love each other in God, and in accordance with God's rights over us, then what they feel for each other is not truly love at all.

To love (let us mark it well) is to desire the good of the beloved, and to endeavor to bring that good to pass. But the beloved's truest good is to live in the friendship of God; in oneness with Christ. Christian marriage, then, is a state of life in which two who truly love each other, in the true meaning of love, assist each other to love Him by obedience to Him.

For the husband, then, the wife is a door into holiness; she is a way to God; and for his wife, the husband is a path to sanctity. In the Sacrament of Matrimony, husband and wife are to cooperate with Christ in each other's sanctification. Why else, pray, did Christ raise marriage to the dignity of a sacrament; why else did he make it one of the channels through which He pleases to dispense His divine grace?

This is not to destroy, nor to whittle away, the bodily aspects of life together in marriage. To the contrary; the joy of the coming together of husband and wife cannot be as great and as unalloyed as it ought to be unless consciences are clear. If there is anything of spiritual reproach in married love, their married love will not give the happiness it ought to give. Nor will it confer the unity it is intended to confer—the unity, the peace, the harmony, the serenity which ought to be its fruits.

This harmony and serenity of husband and wife are the deepest foundation for the happiness of the family. How many, many children live in a deep unease, rebelling against what they know not, because their father and mother are not united in Christ, or at least imagine that they are not united in Christ!

“Imagine that they are not united in Christ.” This is a real and painful condition in our day of the opposite errors of puritanism and hedonism. Many a husband and wife are prevented, either by prudery or by the prevailing over-emphasis upon sex, from finding in marriage the joy and the security-in-God that this great sacrament was instituted to give them.

Either they enter into their giving of each other with consciences stricken by rigorism, or they expect more of their giving than even this great giving can give. In the one case, they feel guilty; in the other, they feel cheated. No; the Christian husband and wife must acquire the Christian attitude of mind toward marriage, if they are to find in marriage the depths of joy and goodness which they ought to find there.

Marriage, the Sacrament of Matrimony, is first a union of souls. Husband and wife love each other; not in the modern mistaken meaning of being “in love,” but in the right meaning that they are prepared to serve each other, to defend each other, to sacrifice for each other, to work together in mutual well-wishing for success in marriage. Out of the union of souls, out of this true love of each other, comes the union of bodies; and each union contributes constantly to the perfecting and deepening of the other.

Husband and wife must understand that Matrimony, like the other sacraments, was earned for us by Christ on the cross. It was not a niggling and fearful thing that He wished to confer upon us—and did confer. No; Christ desires that marriage shall be generous, and that husband and wife understand that their mutual giving is good and pleasing to Him. He wants husband and wife to see each other as pathways to Him; He wants them walking hand in hand, and heart in heart, toward Him.

If we are to see Christ in the least of His brethren, are we not to see Him in our own husbands and wives? Indeed, it is in our husbands and wives, in the Sacrament of Matrimony, that we ought to see Christ most clearly and intimately.

Marriage is its own vocation, and into it we are to throw ourselves with the same kind of dedication and self-abandonment that we expect of a priest in his vocation.

For the husband, his wife and children are Christ most closely and immediately. Wife and children are his vocation; his way to holiness. It is a lesser vocation than the religious vocation, in the same sense that a man is a little less than an

angel. But this does not mean that a man is not a marvelous being; and it does not mean that marriage is not a marvelous vocation. And as a man or woman, in the order of grace, can rise higher than an angel, so can a husband and wife rise higher, in the order of grace—in the Sacrament of Matrimony—than this or that priest or Sister in another vocation.

We are not to be comparing our way of life, we wives and husbands, with the way of life of those in religion. We are not to be comparing our way of life with any other way. Our task is to devote ourselves to our Own way wholeheartedly, with full trust in God's grace and providence, and with the fullest possible realization of the sublimity of our own vocation.

Nobody, really, goes directly to God. Everybody must go through certain channels and in some service to fellowmen. The way to God for husband and wife is through each other and their children, and in love of them and service to them. That is why it is a fruitful meditation to think of one's own son or daughter on the cross.

Our sons and daughters are given to us in order that we may help them to salvation, and they us. A parent thinking of one of his children on the cross can come closer to Christ, can understand much more of what Christ suffered for us, can be more intimately united with Christ in His Passion. And certainly the parent can better understand, while thinking of his own child crucified, what Mary sacrificed for us.

In this kind of meditation, parents can find the true wisdom of marriage and the family. Making the Way of the Cross, and thinking of their beloved own children, they can more clearly and poignantly think of Christ, and love Christ and thank Him for His goodness.

Then, returning home, a husband can look upon his wife and children, or a wife upon her husband and children, and see Christ in them, and grasp something of the nobility and the deep goodness of Christian marriage and family life.

XII - JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

THE HARSH WORD you spoke to your wife...the nagging you inflicted on your husband...the feud you had with your neighbor...the impatient blow you struck one of your children, or the loveless punishment to which you subjected him because he did something that annoyed you....

These are among the things for which Christ died, and for which Mary, in intolerable anguish, watched Him die. These things are not the least of the things that scourged Him and crowned Him with thorns, and hung Him on the Cross. They are not the least of the things that condemned Our Lady to stand helpless before Him, unable to ease His pain, to comfort His heart, to wipe away the blood from His face that His nailed hands could not touch.

Oh, we are angry, and rightly angry, over the inhumanities, the abominations, inflicted upon men and women and children, and upon the cardinals and bishops and priests of Christ, by the Stalins and the Hitlers and the Titos. But usually there is nothing that we can directly do to stop that sort of thing. It is not so with the inhumanities that we commit against those nearest to us—our own fathers and mothers, our own wives and husbands, our own children and neighbors. Those inhumanities, we can do something about. We can stop them.

We complain, too, about the attacks of anti-Catholics upon the Church—the lies they tell about her, the preposterous charges they voice, the calumnies and slanders and insinuations they publish. Sometimes we can do something to correct such situations, and sometimes we can't. But always we can do something about our own coldness to Christ. And cold we are. Cold!

Each day the Church offers us the Mass; offers us the opportunity to join with Mary and Joseph, with the angels and saints, in adoring and thanking Christ as He immolates Himself again for us. Are we there? How few are present in the parish church each morning! How few families are represented by even one member! And why are we not represented? Because we are slothful. Just plain slothful.

Sloth is that insidious, that sneaking, that small and mean and cheap weakness which counsels us to be careless and indolent about spiritual things. Sloth whispers to us that we need our sleep; that we are too tired to rise twenty or thirty minutes earlier in the morning in order to be at Mass. What a thieving and lying thing is sloth, and how it deludes us into depriving ourselves, through our own fault, of riches beyond the wildest power of words to describe!

Each day the Church offers Communion to us; offers Christ Himself to be the invigoration and the sanctification of our souls, the enlightenment of our minds—indeed, even the protection of our bodies, our families, our homes and our country. But sloth, that miserable thing, makes fools of us and leaves us lying abed, missing the greatest things that life can give to us.

We ask ourselves, when we stop to think, why did I quarrel with my wife or husband? Why was I short-tempered, even mean, perhaps even cruel, with the children? Why did I fall into this sin or that sin? Why am I so petty, so uncharitable, so quick to pride and anger and vanity? Why do I complain about everything, and appreciate almost nothing?

Why am I unhappy? Why do I not walk through life singing and smiling, uplifted by the beauty of things? Why am I short and surly with the woman I love and the children I love—with the very persons who, if they were dead before me, my heart would be broken, my life would be desolated?

Why, why, why? The answer is immediately at hand. The answer is our failure, through laziness and self-indulgence, to take advantage of the sources of grace that would transform our souls into shining things, that would open our minds and hearts to the nobility of existence.

The Mass is there, Holy Communion is there, the Sacrament of Penance is there, the Blessed Sacrament is there, the Stations of the Cross are there, the Rosary is within reach whenever we want to stretch out our hands to it.

Christ died to redeem us and to offer us holiness. He died in a world-shaking agony to try to drive home to us the great lesson of what we are. He died to try to make us see ourselves as He sees us. And how does Christ see us?

Let us look at ourselves through the eyes of Christ. What was it God said when He created us? “Let us make man to our image and likeness.”

Now, everything that exists is a reflection of God. The sunset, the flowers reflect His beauty. The wind, the waterfall reflect His power. The mountains, and great seas, reflect His majesty. The night sky, the stars, the blazing sun, the moon, the trees, the rocks and sands, the animals and insects, the corn growing on the prairie, the tomato ripening on the vine, the worm industriously fertilizing the soil—all reflect something of God’s infinite perfection.

God said, “Let us make man to our image and likeness.” And He gathered up in man something of all these reflections. From all the created kingdoms he took a part of man, so that when Adam and Eve stood before Him, all creation stood there. Man is mineral, man is vegetable, man is sensitive like the animals, man is spiritual. The nobility of man’s nature is beyond the power of words to express fully. And yet this, all this, is only a beginning.

On the Cross, Christ took man and added the divine. Through His sacraments, He supernaturalizes the inexpressible natural nobility of man. Man now becomes God’s own son and daughter; we are made princes and princesses of Christ’s eternal and infinite kingdom.

Why, it would not be too much to say that angels are stricken with awe at the sight of us, because we are filled with Christ, we are temples of the Holy Spirit, and in us the Son of Man and the Son of God takes up His abode, as He promised, with the Father and the Holy Ghost.

This, then, is a Christian. This is a baptized man or woman. This is one who can walk into the House of God, and go forward toward the altar, and receive the Risen Christ, true God and yet true man—our Creator, our Redeemer and our Brother—for food and drink for the soul. That is what we are; and yet we snap at one another, we fill our homes with disputes and contentions, with grabbings, with jealousies and suspicions, with ungodliness and inhumanities toward one another.

What preposterous foolishness! What imbecility!

No; we cannot talk around it; we cannot refuse to face it. Christ dying on the Cross is dying to make us like unto Him; to make our homes like the House at Nazareth; to make our families like the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. There is no use in our sitting around telling ourselves that sanctity is for monks and hermits, for priests and Brothers and Sisters. Yes, sanctity is for them; but sanctity is for us, too.

It is our business, we who are husbands and wives and children, we who are family and home people—it is our business to Christize ourselves and our houses and our neighborhoods. That is the business that we ought to be about. If

we were about it as we ought to be, gradually we would Christize all the world; we would create world peace; we would disarm and harmonize the nations.

The Mass and the Sacraments are there at our beck and call, to give us the power and wisdom and zeal we need. Only one thing remains: Are we going to do something about it, or are we going to leave untapped, or hardly touched, the power that would flow to us from Christ Crucified if only we would open our hearts to it?

XIII-JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS

I THINK THAT WHEN a faithful Catholic dies, there is much less reason for fear, and much more reason for rejoicing than most of us imagine.

The trouble is that we do not really grasp the greatness of being a Catholic. We do not realize what tremendous things we accomplish merely by doing our duty.

For instance, it does not seem to me that the mortal sinfulness of deliberately missing Mass on Sundays consists only in the absence of the one person. Missing Mass is much worse than that.

Each new Catholic is a new means by which Christ carries forward through time and space His divine mission of redeeming mankind and making mankind holy.

Each Catholic is an instrument which Christ has the right to use in His work. Each Catholic is a new tongue with which Christ can speak, a new heart through which He can love, a new pair of hands which He can join in prayer.

Each Catholic, in truth, is a new pair of shoulders with which Christ can carry the cross of the world's sin. Each of us is a new body and soul in which Christ can live, and in which Christ can die.

The Catholic at Mass, then, is not merely one person giving to God the honor, adoration and gratitude which he owes to God. The Catholic at Mass is a representative.

Just as Christ took upon Himself the burdens of all of us, surely each of us, caught up in Christ as we are, must take upon ourselves the burdens of many others.

We must act, too, for those who do not know—or do not care—that they too should be acting.

When I am at Mass, how do I know how many hundreds or thousands or even millions of pagans are mystically present with me at Mass?

I do not mean to suggest that the pagans realize anything like this. No; I mean only that my presence at Mass, and my reception of Communion, might well be so pleasing to God that in return He will shower blessings not only upon me, but also upon millions of those who do not know Him.

Indeed, this is not merely possible; it is highly probable. The presence of the Church in the world is what constantly prevents mankind from lapsing into unspeakable vice. The presence of the Church is what protects the world from being cursed by God. The presence of the Church continually exerts persuasion for the transformation of the world into the kind of world that God meant it to be.

It seems to me, then, that the gravity of the sin of missing Mass on Sunday does not arise merely from the fact that one person is absent, but that this one person who ought to be winning God's favor for many others is neglecting not only his own spiritual welfare, but theirs also.

He is hampering Christ's work among men. And hampering Christ's work is not the proper activity of a Christian. It is gravely contrary to the right Christian activity.

Now we cannot have a great negative without a great positive. If it is mortally sinful deliberately to miss Mass on Sunday without a legitimate reason—and it is—then obviously assisting at Mass on Sunday must be a work of great merit.

If being absent can imperil us with hell, as it does, then being present must carry us a long step forward toward heaven.

Why should it not be so? We belong to Christ by baptism and confirmation; Christ lives in us and works in and through us. At Mass we unite ourselves with Christ in worshipping and praising the eternal Father. We are caught up in Christ, we are offered with Him when He offers Himself in the Mass.

How can it be otherwise than that graces and merits are showered upon the sincere and devout Catholic at Mass—

merits and graces piled up, pressed down and running over?

No; the Catholic doing his duty in life, whether at Mass or Communion, at home, at work, in civil life or wherever, is pleasing to God in very great measure. Every moment of his life, if he clings to the state of grace or regains it promptly in confession if it should be lost, he is walking toward God in heaven.

That is why I say that I think there is much more reason for rejoicing than most of us imagine at the time of the death of a faithful Catholic.

The faithful Catholic is a person who has lived in Christ, and Christ in him. This truth tends to grow dim in our minds.

We see the person's faults; perhaps even we see his virtues. But the one thing we cannot see is the one thing that is important in life— grace.

If our friend who has departed was in the state of grace, in the friendship of God, then obviously his death calls not for wailing, but for rejoicing.

Surely we cannot sorrow over the fact that some one loved has stepped into joys such as the mind cannot imagine!

But I do not mean to suggest that we can escape from our humanity. Certainly we will always be saddened by every parting from those close to us. Certainly we will be most saddened by the long parting of death.

We must expect that; we must endure it; we must carry it as one more of the crosses that God laid upon us in order that we might earn eternity with Him.

But even as we sorrow, we ought also to rejoice. Deep in our consciousness there should be a keen realization that the death of a faithful Catholic cannot be a disaster. It cannot be other than a tremendous triumph.

This, indeed, is what being a Catholic means; it means, in St. Paul's phrase, that as we were buried with Christ in baptism, so will we rise with Christ.

This, then, is the only question we have to ask ourselves—the only question of ultimate importance: "Is Christ living in me—am I living in Christ?"

If we can honestly say that we believe the answer to be yes—if a yes answer is the thing we desire with all our hearts—then it seems to me that we need not waste any of our time or energy upon worries about death.

Death will come when God permits it to come, and not before; and if we are Christ's own when it comes, then it cannot come otherwise than as the one truly tremendous and permanent victory of our life.

If death finds us living in Christ, and Christ in us—as ought to be the case with any faithful Catholic—then like Christ we will be laid in the arms of Mary after we have breathed our last; and what is held in the arms of Mary is forever safe.

XIV-JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

THERE ARE TWO LITTLE words, familiar and dear to Catholics, which to many outside the faith appear to be a contradiction in terms.

"Happy death."

How can death be happy when it is rending of the deepest depths of a human being; when it means a venturing alone into the unknown, and a leaving behind of a part of one's very nature?

Is not there something downright ghoulish about the thought of finding joy in this frightful separation of a man or woman into two parts—this death and dissolution of one part, and this flight of another part to what future we know not?

The answer would be yes, and the pagans would be right, were it not for one fact. Joy and happiness do not reside in the body; they reside in the soul. And the soul cannot die.

The soul, therefore, that is prepared for death cannot be deprived of its happiness, not even in this terrible moment of the tearing apart of human nature.

A happy death indeed is possible. We know that as a matter of divine revelation, and we know it by human experience. We have seen the saints die, and they died happily. We have heard the saints praying for death because they could not wait for the joys that lay in store for them.

We have read how St. Therese of Lisieux longed for this moment that most people dread, and how she promised with

joy to spend her heaven doing good on earth.

St. Therese knew that now at last she was really going to begin to live and to rejoice, and to have powers for serving her fellowmen which she did not have in her life on this earth, for all her holiness.

St. Therese was a real realist. Courageously she had embraced with her mind and her heart the whole truth about herself and about her true reason for existing.

Death did not pounce upon St. Therese from behind; it did not catch her unaware. St. Therese went happily to meet death because she had never fooled herself about its inevitability.

To her, death was the goal toward which she had been running and struggling from childhood; and beyond it lay all the rewards of her great efforts.

Like Job, she had stored up in her heart the fact of death, the fact of entrance into heaven through the opening of death, and the fact that death is not permanent but transitory. Like Job, she had her faith in the resurrection and the moment when she would see God not alone with her soul, but with the eyes of her body, glorified and restored to her.

St. Therese knew profoundly what life is all about and what death is all about. She did not attempt to evade reality; she embraced it, hugged it to her, met all its demands open-eyed, with a heart like a lion.

Is it necessary that we rise to the heights of St. Therese in order that our death may be happy?

Not at all. St. Therese was heroic; so heroic that if there were a stronger word than heroic, we would have to use it.

Heroism means rising above and beyond the call of duty. It means doing far more than is merely necessary. The holiness of the Little Flower of Jesus was not simply enough for her own salvation; it was so great that it showered—and still showers—blessings upon countless others.

It is not required of us that we soar to such heights of spirituality. It is not even expected of us. “Many are called but few are chosen”—that much-disputed biblical passage might well be applied here for our illumination.

We are all called to salvation; comparatively few are chosen for towering sanctity. God’s dispensing of grace is a mystery of His own wisdom and good pleasure; but one thing we know as a truth of faith—to each of us He gives sufficient grace to be saved.

I think we may be certain, too, that to every Catholic God gives the opportunity for much more than merely sufficient grace.

We have the Mass. We have the Holy Eucharist, Confession, Matrimony and the other sacraments. We have the sacramentals. We are members of the Mystical Body of Christ, so that you might say that His mind constantly thinks in our minds and His heart beats with ours.

If we live in the state of sanctifying grace, He lives in us always, and with Him the Father and the Holy Spirit.

There is no good reason at all for any Catholic to have other than a happy death.

Indeed, there is really no good reason for any honest and sincere person to have other than a happy death.

The only possible reason is a bad reason—failure to cooperate with God’s grace, refusal to live according to the light and the grace that God gives.

But the Catholic!—what countless opportunities are his to increase the grace in his soul, to grow daily in holiness, to make of death not a defeat, but a triumph; not a catastrophe to be feared, but a goal to be victoriously crossed; not a terrible darkness into which to step, but a glorious light into which to advance with confidence.

This is the meaning which the Fourteenth Station of the Cross is intended to convey to us.

Christ is placed in the tomb. The body of Christ, broken by his executioners, is laid to rest. But this is not a disaster; this is the moment of triumph. Christ’s body is buried only to await its reunion with Christ’s soul, its glorification, and its eternal rising in life and power on the third day.

Christ died for one reason; to prepare the way for us. His death is our salvation, our redemption. His death is the happiness of our death. He did not leave us; He remains tirelessly with us in His Church, in His Sacraments; and above all, at the time of death, in His sacrament of Extreme Unction.

“The Anointing Unto Glory,” this sacrament has been called by some of the saints. And that, precisely, is what it is.

The Anointing is nothing less than Christ with us as we breathe our last, waiting to take our hand and lead us into the eternal joys.

The Catholic who in life faces the inevitable fact of death, and by fidelity to the Mass, the sacraments and the Commandments makes ready for it—that Catholic does not die alone.

He dies in Christ, and simultaneously lives in Christ. His body closes its tired eyes, and his soul instantly is in Christ's company, because Christ is there in the sacraments with him.

Happy death, indeed! What else can it be, when we have made our last confession, and received our final Holy Communion, and been Anointed in the sacrament which has for its special purpose our immediate entrance into the life of God?

Death is happy for those who have faced death in life, and have made themselves ready for it by using the means that Christ provided. For these, death is a going to sleep in the arms of Our Lady in order that she can awake us and present us joyously to her divine Son.

The Fourteenth Station points to the fact of death, but above all it points farther along, to the fact of eternal life and the fact of the resurrection in glory. What it should impress deeply upon us is that unless we are fools, we will live with Christ in order to die and rise with Him.
